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Paper: Boston Globe

Title: BUD COLLINS ANYWHERE\ DUXBURY - AMERICA'S ORIGINAL SUBURB?

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In the Mayflowering of America, was the original suburb this settlement they called Ducksburrow?

Jay, who is 12 and knows his town, says, "Maybe Plymouth was getting too citified by 1624. Anyway, Myles Standish, John Alden and Elder Brewster thought it would be a good idea to move out here.

Dusk and stillness envelop the lovely Old Burying Ground where Alden, the speak-for-yourself guy, lies, beside his wife, the ex-Priscilla Mullens. The third member of gossipy H. W. Longfellow's triangle, Myles Standish, is stand-offish, looking down from his monumental pedestal atop a nearby rise. "Good hill for skateboarding," says Jay. "Come on, I'll take you to Alden's house. Still in good shape," he says, pointing out the faded beige-shingled dwelling constructed in 1653.

"Alden lived to the age of 88, sired at least a dozen children here and there. Good man to get a town started," says our host, Atlas. "Strong, virile. Believed to be," Atlas smiles, "the town's first musselman, and folks here been picking em and digging clams ever since.

"How long you been in these parts - and you've never made a pilgrimage to Duxbury?" Atlas seems shocked. "Not that we're encouraging pilgrimages," says his friend, Hattie. "Duxbury is small and peaceful. Especially now, before the season begins."

Beautiful and somnolent, its elderly, scrupulously maintained houses and spacious lawns are within sniff and sight of the sea. Maples have begun their annual canopying of Washington and St. George streets. Boats are going in, tennis courts getting in shape once more with rolling and primping. "Probably never seen a cranberry bog, have you?" Atlas shakes his head. Remedying that he displays one in a proper, faded cranberry hue. "Brightens up in the fall.

"Feel pretty isolated down here, which is nice, even if you have to use the bloody Southeast Expressway to get in or out," he says. "Our cultural Three B's are boats, bogs and booze. Guess the papers come to town, but nobody reads the Globe - too left wing. Herald was our paper till it fell apart. Just read the Duxbury Clippuh."

Hattie says, "Ought to take them to the beach. You can still get in there without a car permit this time of year."

King Caesar road ambles out toward the Atlantic along Powder Point, past the stately four-chimneyed yellow brick mansion of a man they called King Caesar. "His real name," says Jay, "was Ezra Weston. He was the shipbuilding king when Duxbury was a sailing ship center late 18th, early 19th century."

"Talk about sailing ships, this thing is about the same vintage," says Atlas as the car begins clumping along the half-mile fright called Powder Point Bridge, spanning the bay.

Hattie says, "It's supposedly the oldest, longest wooden bridge in America, or something like that. Every year there's a movement to tear it down and put up a sturdier, safer one - see, there's where somebody went through the railing - but it stays. People are very sentimental about their bridge."

It is windy, brisk on the great expanse of beach that reaches along the F-shaped peninsula from Marshfield on the left to the lighthouse at Gurnet Point on the right. But kids have been swimming in the ocean. "Awesome," chatters one of them through castanetting teeth. "Warm as anything."

"Sure. So is Baffin Bay," says Hattie. But Jay says, "I'll take you a little ways from here, the Back River that flows into the ocean. Good saltwater swimming, and you should be able to go in the water without calling for a pullmotor or a wet suit."

Hattie is justifiably pleased to arrange tennis on the splendid court - fittingly enough, cranberry-toned clay - of friends named Doris and Rob. "Ever see a more stunning setting for a court?" Hattie asks reasonably. Tucked into a hillock and walled on three sides by rocks, the rectangle is bordered by pine and rosebushes and offers marshes and the Back River as backdrop. It lacks only Alps to equal Monte Carlo.

After tennis comes Jay's promised swim. "You're mad," says Atlas. "Swimming is for August."

"Yeah," I say, "but that's high season, and you'll never invite us back then."

"Well, uh, we're not like that, are we Hattie?" he says.

But she says, "Speak for yourself, John."

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